

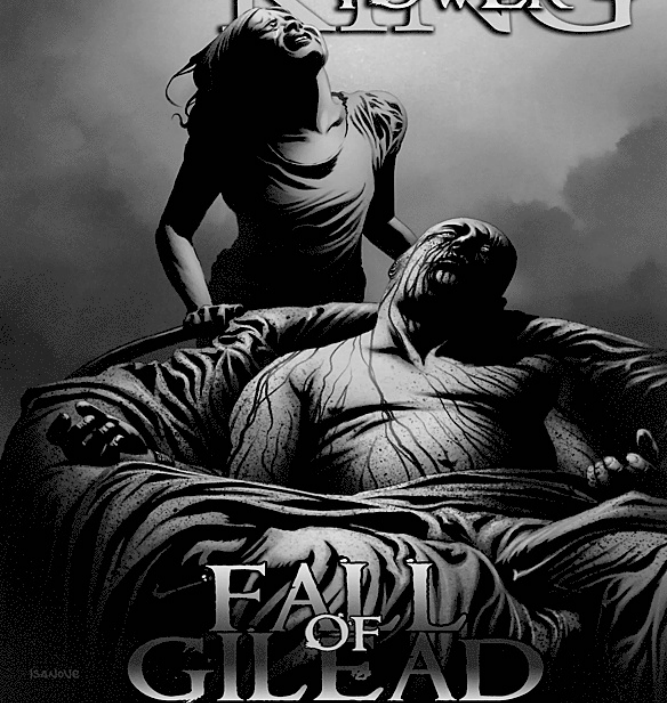
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STEPHEN THE DARK KNIGHT TOWER



FALL OF GILEAD

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IN A WORLD THAT HAS MOVED ON...

As Gilead prepared for the festive celebration of its newly titled gunslingers, Roland's mother prepared to repent for her adulterous sins with the sorcerer Marten. Seemingly out of nowhere, Marten appeared and lured Gabrielle into becoming the prime element in the planned assassination of her husband Steven with the help of Steven's great enemy, John Farson, and Farson's nephew and spy, Kingson. Distrusting of his returned mother, Roland left the festivities to find the destructive sphere called Maerlyn's Grapefruit hidden away in her chambers. The sphere drew him into a hallucination that provoked him into fatally shooting Gabrielle...

Meanwhile, Steven Deschain has discovered his wife's treachery and heads to his chambers where he sees that Maerlyn's Grapefruit is gone from his safe. And the only person who was close enough to Stephen to take the key was Gabrielle Deschain. The posse is ambushed by Slow Mutants and one of Steven's men takes a poison dart intended for him.

Back in Gilead, Roland's former teacher, Cort, discovers the treachery of Farson's nephew and slays him.

But then, upon reading a journal Kingson left in his room, Cort is poisoned by fine particles left on the pages...

*It's a terrible thing, standing
there, watching someone you
care about die by inches.*

*Happened to me a few times.
If it ain't happened to you,
well, you're luckier than you
could possibly ken.*



Couldn't say for sure how many times Vannay had to deal with it. But if watching what's befalling Cort is even his first time, as unlikely as that is...

...it's gotta be one time too many.

Cort? Cort... some of your students are here. They wish to extend their...

Condolences?

Their best wishes for a... a speedy recovery.

Then let's hope they're better than you.





And Roland?
Is he numbered
among the motley
crew?

He is...
detailed. He
shall be here
anon.

If "anon" means
posthumously,
ay, 'tis so.



Lying to a
dead man earns
you... a special
place in hell...
Vannay.

My body may
betray me, but
my ear... remains
keen. It hears
nurses talking
in whispers...

They speak
of Roland in jail...
they call him traitor...
they say he's for
the rope...

It will
never
happen,
Gort.



Why should
I believe... an
established
liar?

I pray
you're right...
but if not...

I will meet
him in the clearing
and speak for him in
the hall of judgment,
thus vesting my
death timing...

...and
I will say...



...that if my
greatest student
was strung up like
a common
thief...

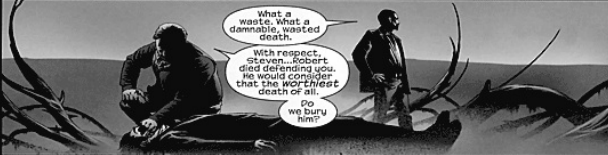
...then
damn Gilead
to a fate
it richly
deserves.



"...and remember
the face of your
fathers.

"My life's race is run...
but yours...and theirs...
will depend upon the
lessons that I have
taught you all."





What a waste. What a damnable, wasted death.

With respect, Steven...Robert died defending you. He would consider that the *worthiest* death of all.

Do we bury him?



No. We'll fashion a stretcher and carry him back to Gilead.

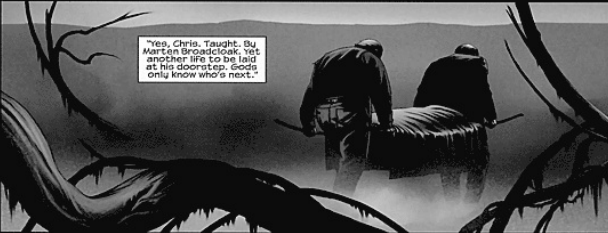
I'll not have the mutants digging him up and feasting on his body.

The mutants. When did mutants start using *poison* darts? They're little more than animals.



Even animals can be taught tricks.

Taught?



"Yes, Chris. Taught. By Martin Broadcloak. Yet another life to be laid at his doorstep. Gods only know who's next."



Cort!

My niece...
wears a dress.
Now I KNOW the
end...is near...



Aileen,
stay back--!

You can't die!
You promised to
teach me!



finally...
someone with
her...priorities
in order...

You have already
learned so much, Lady
Griza...slayer of the
horror Grus Dick...would
have nothing on
you...

The darkness
falls upon me...and
yet I see things
so much more...
clearly...

Damn the
old ways...you,
and every woman
with a fighting heart...
deserve to be a
gunslinger...



If...if it meant
you living...I would
foreswear ever--

Don't
you dare...
complete that
sentence.

Don't ever
let anyone...
even you
yourself...

...make
you less
than you
are...



Don't you understand?
As long as you remember my lessons...

...I will never die...

I will live on in you...



...so that when you find the bastard who did this to me...

...and shoot him in his black heart...

...in a way...
I will be my finger... upon the trig--



The convulsions seize his body, then, and Aileen cries out his name and begs him not to die, pleads with him...

...even orders him.

But Cort is his own man, and as always, does what he believes to be right.



*And at that particular moment,
not wanting to prolong the
heartache of his loved ones...*

*...he knows it is right
that he should die.*

*And so he
does.*



Aileen...
It's
over.

You wear
his blood. Let's
get you washed
up--



"Washed up?"
Because I should
become all
prettified...

...so I can
sit and be quiet
like a good
little girl?!



Coins for the
Ferriman,
Cort. Smooth
voyage.

That's *not* what
I meant! At all!
You're being--

A hysterical female?!
Like girls are wont
to be?

Aileen,
for gods' sakes!



I'm
sorry,
I...

You're
just trying
to help. I
know that.





Women ain't the only ones that leave men scratching their heads.

There's Sheemie, for instance...



...who disappeared himself right into the heart of Gilead, as passing as a thought, leaving guards confused and downright spooked.

That's it. That's a good Cap.



You just chew on some of that nice grass, and wait here with Sheemie 'til dark.

Other people, they get a'scared 'gawwwn' of the dark, but if you wants to avoid sunlight, it's the best way. We can sneaky-sneak in the dark.



The 'gawwwn' dark is our Friend, yes it is.



Yup. Women is on everybody's minds, it seems.



Not the least of whom is Aileen herself.

The one man who understood me is gone.

Crying about it isn't going to change it.



And the fact is...the fact is...



...that even the best of the men is going to think just like Cuthbert.

A black and white comic panel showing a woman from the chest up, adjusting her hair with both hands. She is looking down at her hands.

They look
at me and all
they see is a
woman.

They judge
me by my hair...
my clothes...
my body...

A black and white comic panel showing a close-up of a person's hands holding a small, dark, rectangular object. The person is wearing a dark jacket with a strap across the chest.

Fine.
Done and
done.

A large black and white comic panel. In the center is a large, ornate oval mirror. Inside the mirror is a woman with short dark hair, wearing a dark, draped garment. She is holding a small object in her right hand. To the right of the mirror is a decorative lamp with a tassel. In the foreground, there are some dark, ornate metal pieces.

So let them
now judge me
solely by the
cunning of my
mind...

...the
strength of
my spirit...

...and the
accuracy of
my eye and
hand.

And let
that be my
legacy.





Alain?
Alain, I
said--

I heard you
and, short answer,
she'd kill *you*, or
herself, or
both.

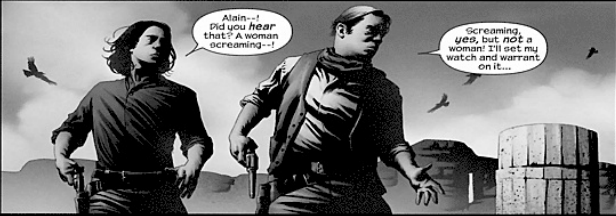
The long
answer can
wait. See those
crows?



Yes. Gods...
look at them.
An ominous
sign, that.

Those carrion-
eating scavengers
show up when they
think there will be
food aplenty.

When a
murder of
crows appears,
it brings war on
its wings.



Alain--!
Did you *hear*
that? A woman
screaming--!

Screaming,
yes, but *not* a
woman! I'll set my
watch and warrant
on it...









I suppose when you're dealing with something that's unthinkable...

...it ain't what first pops into your mind.

It just don't occur to you until you're faced right with it.



And then you're overwhelmed.



He lets the guns that are offered him--his father's guns--fall to the floor.

And now he fully kens Aileen's last words to Cort.

For he would as soon never own the guns... never wield one again... if it meant having his father back with him.

For the family of gunslingers of Gilead, a brace of kinsmen has been lost this day.

And as Vannay prepares his dear friend's body for burial, here's one brutal truth we need to keep in mind.



Yes?

Vannay?

The very same. But this is not the best time to--

Actually, I have a message for you.

Oh? Might be very well. If it is *bad* news, then-- as the saying goes-- I shall try not to kill the messenger.





That
won't be an
issue.

And that brutal
truth I mentioned
before is this:



The day's
not over.

BLAM

TO BE CONTINUED

AILEEN RITTER AND THE FEMALE GUNSLINGER

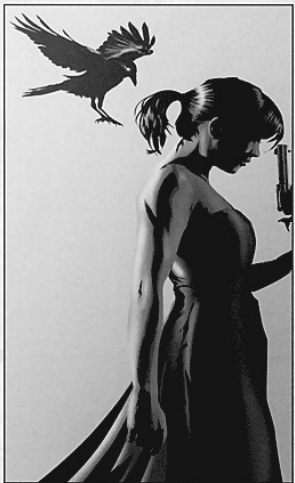
Over the past year I have participated in three different panels about women in comics. In each case, the panel discussion focused on two very specific but interrelated issues. First, how are women depicted in the pages of comic books, and second, what role do women play in the comic book industry? In each case, a third question has always arisen quite naturally from the topics at hand. Namely, how do women writers and artists choose to depict female characters in their own work?

I'm always really pleased to participate in these panels, but I am also always slightly daunted. First of all, although I've been writing and publishing in other areas for about twenty years, I'm still pretty new to comics. I came to the illustrated page as Roland Deschain's sidekick, and so I don't have the long professional history in the industry that most of my panel-mates have. Secondly, unlike many of the other panel participants, I am a writer, not a writer/artist. Hence my work is always collaborative, and the final product that emerges is inevitably a melding of multiple imaginative visions, both male and female. Finally

and most importantly, though I inhabit Mid-World and though I have become, over the years, one of its naturalized citizens, I am not its ultimate architect. Although I create the plots for the Dark Tower story arcs, Mid-World's culture, its social codes, its history, and the majority of its female characters were originally created by the master storyteller Stephen King, and one of my main priorities is to remain true to his original vision.

So, you might ask, what do I do during these panels? Although I feel I'm too much of





a neophyte to discuss the comic book business as a whole or to speak for other women writers and artists whose situations and paths have probably been very different from mine, I always try to share at least part of my own experience. After all, I'm a woman writing predominantly about men, and about a very masculine world, and that in itself is quite a strange situation when you think about it. And although I may have inherited Mid-World's characters and customs, don't we *all* inherit the societies we inhabit? We don't *make* our cultures—we're born into them and are shaped by them.

Throughout the Dark Tower novels Stephen King makes it very clear that Mid-World is closely related to our world. In fact, the two are twins. When we read about Mid-World we are staring at a mirror-image of our own reality. And though that mirror image may not seem to reflect our present culture, it *does* reflect a mythic past, a kind of contemporary dream-life that underlies our waking lives. Because Mid-World reflects our culture's mythic history, its heroic codes of behavior and its gender roles are extremely familiar to us. In fact, they reflect rules and ideals of conduct that we absorbed so early in our lives that it is difficult for us to articulate just where they came from or how they have affected our perceptions of the world around us, and of ourselves.

With my whole heart, I have tried to bring the Gilead of Roland's youth to life, and through the medium of Gilead's predominantly male cast and male heroic codes I have tried to explore what it means to be human. But as a woman, I have also tried to explore a theme which arises quite explicitly in the later Dark Tower novels, namely, what does it mean to be a woman in such a male-oriented world?

Although most of Roland's youthful memories are focused on his male friends and male teachers—and of course, his tragic love, Susan Delgado—implied in all of those memories is a story about the fate of Mid-World's women. After all, does not Susan Delgado pay for her amorous rebellion—her decision

to stand and be true to herself and her lover Roland rather than her social role—with her very life? Does not Roland's adventure in Hambry *begin* because he has discovered his mother's covert affair with Marten Broadcloak?

When I started plotting *Treachery* I made a conscious decision to try to explore the women of Gilead as well as the men. I wanted to know their motivations, their desires, and their heartbreaks. Roland's mother betrayed her people, but I knew that there was a *reason* for that betrayal, and that her story would tell us much more about the inner workings of Gilead. Similarly, I chose to expand the role of Aileen Ritter—a young girl who has her heart set on becoming a gunslinger though the world tells her it is forbidden—because I knew it would show me what growing up in Gilead must have been like for young women. But my ultimate goal in expanding the role of female characters in Gilead was not just to create a wider scope for the story. I also wanted to use the Mid-World mirror to explore what it has meant, historically, to be female in *our* world. By doing this, I felt that I was also remaining true to Stephen King's original vision. After all, as every Dark Tower fan knows, although Roland grew up in a world where women were not allowed to be warriors, in the later novels, women and women fighters play a huge part in Roland's tale.

Appropriately enough, I first started to contemplate the complexities of being a woman writing about Mid-World after the first of my panels about *women in comics* ended. The convention was in England, and I was

just leaving the conference room when a young fellow in his twenties came up to talk to me. He was smiling, but he looked pretty abashed. It only took a minute for me to find out why. *I thought you were a man*, he said. *My friends and I, we all really thought you were a man!* At first I had to laugh (after all, I haven't been mistaken for anything but female since puberty) but then I started to think more deeply about what such a mistake meant. On the one hand I was pleased that my take on a male coming-of-age story had been so convincing, but then I started to wonder how it was that I manage to step out of this female body of mine and *become* Cuthbert, Alain, or Roland. What is it inside of me that identifies so completely with an experience which is ultimately so radically different from my own?

It took a lot of soul-searching before I realized the truth. But then when I *did* realize what was going on inside my heart and mind I saw that the answer had been on my bookshelves all along. Like so many women writers of the last few centuries, I'd been mentally cross-dressing for years!

When I was little, I often played a game called "Tom, Dick, Sue, and Tina" with my sisters and a couple of neighborhood girls. Tom, Dick, Sue, and Tina had a spaceship, and they spent their time exploring alien worlds. Since I was the youngest, I was always assigned the part of Tina. (I guess it sounded a bit like "tiny".) I think I was about four when I realized that I was sick of being Tina. She never got to do anything fun. For that matter, neither did Sue. Tom and Dick got all the good parts—the



laser fights, the scouting jobs, the encounters with hostile life forms. Tina and Sue were always instructed to stay close to the spaceship, where they'd be safe. (What can I say? This was the late 1960s/early 1970s, and feminism hadn't come to my neighborhood yet.)

It didn't matter that we were all girls. From watching television (*Leave it to Beaver* reruns were still on Channel 48, as was *Gilligan's Island* and my personal favorite, *Star Trek*), we all knew that boys had the most exciting adventures, and that girls became moms or girlfriends or maidens-in-distress. Hence, if I wanted to be the star of my own dream-life, I would have to switch genders. (Hey, Uhura was great, but I really wanted to be Spock.)

By about age six, I had forged myself a playtime identity. I became a boy. It felt really freeing. I could be a pirate, a spy, or return to the Stone Age to fight dinosaurs and know that I was

powerful enough to emerge triumphant. It wasn't like I was a *weak* and *emotional* girl anymore. Who wanted to be one of those? Hadn't I heard somebody on one of the news programs my parents watched say that a woman could never be president, since as soon as she was faced with a crisis she would cry?

By the time I reached puberty, I'd overcome at least some of my ambivalence about being female. But unfortunately I still couldn't identify with any of the images of femininity I saw around me, because none of them reflected how I felt on the *inside*. Why was it that all the things I wanted from life seemed to be reserved for boys and men? Couldn't I have ambitions too? I began to secretly suspect that I was a boy in really good drag. As you can imagine, it was a pretty isolating experience. It wasn't until the transformative ideas of the 60s and 70s began to leak into my town that I began to discover that I didn't have to be this stereotype called *boy* or this

stereotype called *girl*. I could be myself.

As I've already said, I believe that Mid-World is, among other things, a cultural mirror for our world. The hierarchical, heroic code by which its gunslingers live is glorious, but the fact that the society it engenders has so little personal and social mobility is what brings about its eventual destruction. When I contemplate the inequalities of Gilead, I can't help but think about the Langston Hughes poem, "Montage of a Dream Deferred." Deferred dreams can dry up and blow away like chaff, or they can poison the person who once held them dear. But such deferred dreams can also turn into time bombs. And as we know, time bombs are destined to explode.

I think most readers will agree with me when I say that Mid-World is, in almost every way, a man's world, and a world where those born to power are expected to keep it. Gilead's elite social group is the caste of gunslingers, and though women may belong to that caste, they are barred from training in the art of war, which—in Gilead—is the most important of callings. Mid-World is also a static world, where the caste a person is born into will—for the most part—define him (or her) for the rest of their life. The gunslingers' code of honor is closer to the heroic codes of the ancient world than to the contemporary codes of behavior that we believe in today. Great heroes were expected to be courageous and fearless, and to put loyalty to clan and *dinh* above all else. But in Gilead, it was the face of the father, and not the mother, that was to be remembered.

Ultimately, it is the oppressed people of Gilead—both male and female—who join with John Farson's rebels and bring Mid-World, as we know it, to an end. And it is the danger of this suppressed energy—a desire which is not allowed to manifest—which still holds a lesson for us today. We all love Gilead, but ultimately Gilead—with its strict hierarchies and its rules of what men and women can do and cannot do—is destined to fall.

Think of the Tower card in the Tarot pack. When the time-honored structures we have lived with all of our lives begin to col-

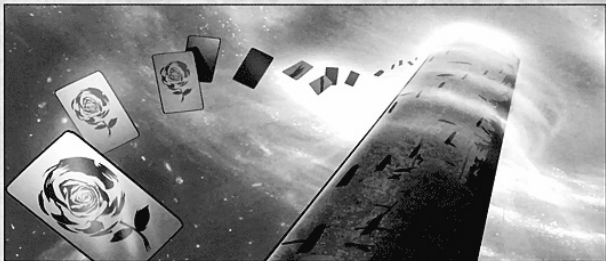


lapse, we feel as if the heavens themselves are falling. But it is only when those outdated structures collapse that we are free to create afresh. Gilead is not a utopia: it is one stage in a culture's transformative evolution. And ultimately, *transformation*—or building something stronger out of the ashes of the past—is part of what the Dark Tower novels are all about.

When it came time for me to write out the tales of Roland's boyhood, I looked at Gilead as a place I knew well, and loved, but which also caused me great sadness. What were my places in that world? I could be Roland's mother, married to a man who—because of the heroic code—put his duty to clan and Father before his love for me. I could become one of the Sisters of the Rose (which I had adapted from the much more sinister *Little Sisters of Eluria*), but ultimately such a nun-like existence would kill me. No matter which way I looked at it, I kept getting the same image. I saw a girl, much like me, staring into a mirror and hating what she saw. A girl who—enraged that every door

she wanted to open was nailed shut—grabbed a pair of scissors and began cutting off her hair, which was ultimately a symbol of her girlhood, her voicelessness, her *difference*.

In the original novels, Aileen Ritter plays only a very tiny part. Her tale takes up about two sentences. We are told that Aileen is the girl that Roland's parents *wanted* him to marry. The rest of her story—what appears in the comics you are presently reading—grew out of my own life, my own hopes, and my knowledge of *what will happen in Mid-World once Gilead falls*. In fact I would go so far as to say that Mid-World's collapse, and Aileen's accomplishments on behalf of *all* girls who want to be gunslingers, could only happen in a land where all the old ways have *already* become unstable. If the old order was still intact, would Cort have felt compelled to train his niece in the ways of war? Ultimately, Cort wanted Aileen to be safe, but some deep instinctual part of himself whispered that someday, Gilead would need *all* of her talented fighters, regardless of





birth, background, or sex. And it is this openness to difference—which in our comics we attribute to Roland's greatest teacher, Cort—that Roland practices throughout the later Dark Tower novels.

In the wreckage of Mid-World which Roland travels through as a lost and lonely adult, he remembers the faces of the many lost mothers. In *The Waste Lands*, he pays homage to an ancient matriarch who holds her town together despite the harriers who come through burning and looting and blinding. In *The Wolves of the Calla*, he fights alongside a group of women warriors, called The Sisters of Oriza, and acknowledges that they are his most important allies in his battle against the Wolves of End-World. And perhaps most importantly, from *The Drawing of the Three* until *The Dark Tower*, we watch Roland throw aside all of the rules of his culture in order to train a woman named Susannah Dean in the ways of the White, and then to call her comrade.

As I have already said, I didn't make Mid-World; I inherited it. But as I also said, we all inherit a worldview. We don't make the rules or the codes of right/wrong, honorable/dishonorable which we're expected to understand and uphold—we absorb them. And once these rules of behavior are absorbed, they become—for good or for dis—central to our identity. But sometimes it is important to *stand and be true*, and remember—as the adult Roland does—that *everyone* has a face that must be remembered. It doesn't matter if the individual is male or female, black or white, young or old. It doesn't matter if the person walks on two feet or uses a wheelchair to make it across the terrain, as does Susannah. Just because we're told that something is right doesn't mean that it is right. *The world moves on*, but as Roland himself would admit, we can try to make it move on in a better direction. **CR**

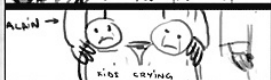
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ROBIN FURTH
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DENNIS CALERO

**DARK TOWER:
FALL OF GILEAD
ISSUE #3
SKETCHBOOK**

**A look at the creative team's in-progress work,
including layouts, pencil art and cover concepts.**

Richard Isanove's layouts with his notes.

Peter David scripts his dialog using these breakdowns of Robin Furth's plot.





Richard Isanove's black and white artwork.
The finished versions appear earlier in this issue.











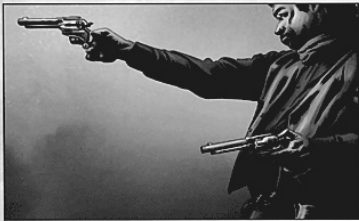


Rising Marvel superstar Mitch Breitweiser (CAPTAIN AMERICA, UNCANNY X-MEN) brings Mid-World's Western influences to the fore in his searing variant cover painting. Seen here is his initial concept art.



**NEXT: The honorable people of Gilead versus
Roland Deschain!**





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain, the young man whose destiny it is to seek and save the Dark Tower, is haunted by horrifying visions from the evil seeing sphere, Maerlyn's Grapefruit. The Crimson King, enemy of all that lives, has long plotted the utter destruction of the Tower, and the undoing of reality itself. Now, with Roland unable to act, his monstrous foe has put his plan into motion...

From the creative team that brought Roland's early adventures to life in *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born*, *The Dark Tower: The Long Road Home*, and *The Dark Tower: Treachery* comes the next chapter of this dark saga of friendship, betrayal and a cosmic quest as conceived by master storyteller Stephen King.

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